

The Nice Guy

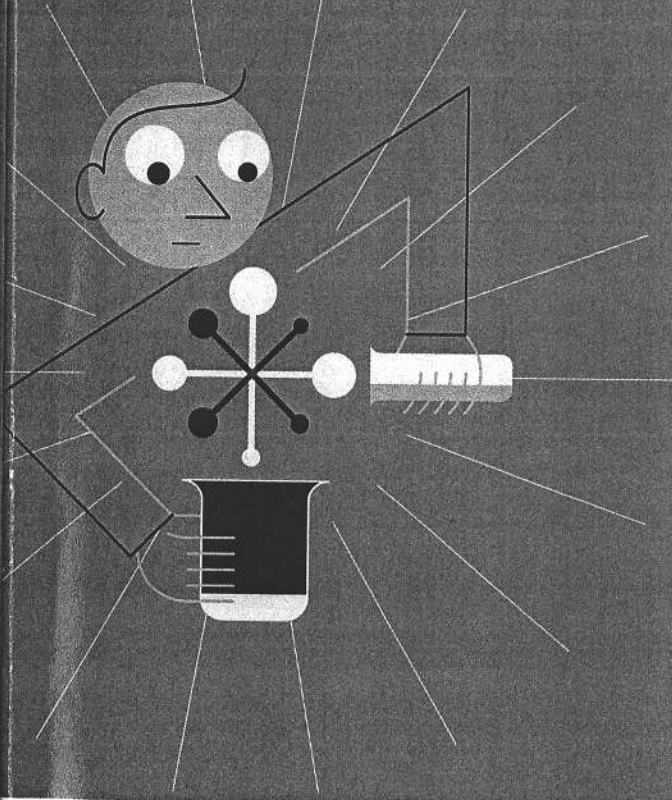
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Paul Kennedy is a good fellow who trusts people, and he's in line to become CEO of Daner Associates. Is he tough enough for the job?

The Nice Guy

by Russ Edelman and Tim Hiltabiddle

7:01 AM

**Driving East on Clifton Boulevard
Toward Downtown Cleveland**

Damn. I'm still stuck in traffic. Accident ahead? Thank goodness Larry doesn't show up these days until 11:00 at the earliest. I can get a lot done before our one-on-one later today provided Lisa finalized those projections for the European offices yesterday. Once she's plugged the numbers into the forecasting model, we'll have our economic case close to perfect. When I show Larry the expansion plans, he'll give me one of those arm punches and tell me how great I am. Maybe he'll say he's finally ready to pass me the baton. We could jointly announce it at the company meeting next week.

Poor Sheila. She didn't look well this morning when I kissed her goodbye... Amy had the sniffles last night. Hope we're not in for another winter cold. That's two already this year. I don't want Sheila to be sick on Friday. We've got reservations at Giovanni's. Jeez, married 15 years already. Hard to believe. Can't wait 'til she sees the diamond studs I bought her. Note to self: Remember to buy roses.

[Brakes suddenly.] Whoa, it would be nice if you signaled, lady! Oh, I see, "Baby on Board." The kid's probably crying.... I remember that time, driving Amy to day care. She dropped her bottle and screamed her head off.

Wow, Clifton's a parking lot today. I'll give Lake a shot. I may as well try to

HBR's cases, which are fictional, present common managerial dilemmas and offer concrete solutions from experts.

make some calls. Maybe Lisa's in the office already.

7:14 AM

Heading Eastbound on Lake Avenue

[Calls Lisa on her cell.] "Hi Lisa, it's me, Paul. Hey. I need to touch base on two things. First, how's your mom doing? Did she have a good night?...Uh huh....I see....Wow, I'm sorry to hear that. That's really rough. Sheila sends her love. Please let Lilly know she's in our prayers, OK?"

Also, I want to confirm that we're all set on the expansion numbers. I need the model for my meeting with Larry at 1:30....What?...Oh, I see. What time is her doctor's appointment?...Mmmm....Uh, no, don't sweat it. Just do what you need to do, and I'll figure

When I show Larry the expansion plans, he'll give me one of those arm punches and tell me how great I am. Maybe he'll say he's finally ready to pass me the baton.

out a way to finalize the data. Who was helping you out, Lynne or Aaron?...Neither? Ugh. All right, all right. Call me when you're on your way in to the office, OK? See ya." [Hangs up.]

Damn. This totally messes up my morning. Now I'll have to try to hack my way through the spreadsheet before the meeting.

I can't imagine what it's like taking care of a parent with a terminal illness. How awful. But Lisa's really slipping. She was such a go-getter and a great operations manager, but her focus has been shot since her mother got sick. Last week she forgot to copy the latest

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spreadsheets to the network. Not cool. Work used to be a big priority in her life. But now....I know she still loves Daner as much as I do. It's in her blood. She's always telling me how much better the work environment is since I joined ten years ago.

That long? I can remember so clearly when Larry first told me about Daner Associates, the line he gave me. "Ad agencies are passé," he said. Instead, he was starting a "new media" company. The notion of leaving a great job at TRH and joining his team was the furthest thing from my mind, yet the crazy guy pitched me so hard I couldn't resist. And he was right. He knew that companies would need a strategic partner that could provide creative ideas in all media—print, radio, TV, and "that information superhighway I keep hearing about." Daner was going to be that partner. We've had our ups and downs, but it's been an incredible ride. Up from five people to over a hundred, a client list that boasts some of the biggest companies in the world. And the best part is, it's just the beginning.

Larry is still a tiger, but he's getting a bit tired and wants to golf. I can't blame him for that. It's definitely time for him to retire. Lately I could swear he's been doing the nudge-nudge, wink-wink in my direction. George thinks he's in the running too, but I think he'll be cool with reporting to me. Wonder: Once I'm CEO, should I put George in charge of our European expansion? A footprint in Europe will make us even more indispensable to our clients. It will make us a global leader, not just a domestic shop.

George has done well under Larry for the past two years. He was pretty psyched about his promotion to VP of business development. He's great on the technical end of things, but he still needs more polish and experience with customers. He is feisty, though—always willing to take on anything. And he'll challenge Larry at the drop of a hat. I'm surprised Larry puts up with it and doesn't chop him off at the knees.

Still, when it comes to people, Larry can really be so hard-nosed. His take-

no-prisoners attitude is understandable when bidding on business but not when it comes to people. Like when Larry said Lisa's become a liability lately; he even hinted about replacing her. Ugh. Lay off Lisa? I can barely think the words, let alone say them to her. She's always been my right arm. She usually knows what I'm thinking even before I do. Sure, Jim or Andrea could eventually handle the role of operations manager, but there's a steep learning curve. Note to self: Have another heart-to-heart with Lisa to discuss the possibility of reducing her workload for a while—or maybe see how she'd feel about taking a leave of absence that would let her focus on her mom. I really want the old Lisa back.

7:38 AM

Passing Edgewater Park on the Shoreway

This traffic is ridiculous. If I leave by 6:00, I'm golden. But if I wait until after 6:30 to wake Sheila and the kids on my way out, I'm hosed. At least today I get to see an amazing sunrise. Bonus.

Man, I could jog faster than this. I remember all those brainstorming jogs with Larry along the lake. It was great to compare notes and talk about the future. For an old guy, he did pretty well—up until his heart attack three years ago. I almost lost it last week when he said that he was going to start jogging again—and he's aiming to run the Boston Marathon in April. Please, Larry, stick with golf and sailing!

It'll be fun to blow him away with the strategy and the numbers. It's been a ton of work preparing for this, but now we're ready. We can mobilize quickly once he gives us the green light. I'm a little surprised that he's stayed away from our recent planning sessions. I thought he'd want to provide some feedback and direction. Perhaps it's his way of pulling back and empowering me before handing me the reins.

So, the million-dollar question is: What will he say? I think I know the answer. He'll love the bottom line—that he can golf and sail as much as he wants. He'll like his new chairman-only role so that he can step away from the day-

to-day operations. And he'll admire the return to the origins of the company in which staff development programs become an integral part of Daner's growth strategy.

7:51 AM

Exiting at West 45th Street

Could this traffic be any more annoying? Maybe I'll have better luck on Detroit. Better call Justin back – he left that obscure message. Hope I don't have to run more interference with printing the Sheffield job.

[Calls Justin.] "Justin, it's me, Paul. Yeah, I got your message. Fill me in.... OK, call Randy and push back.... No, I'm not stepping in yet. This is your baby. It's your job. Between you and me, I'm not totally ruling out compromise, but you need to push back. Remind them how much business we've given them over the years, and remember we're talking about a big chunk of change here. Besides, they should have caught the mistake. You can do this, Justin. Keep me posted."

I can't believe this. More problems? Abbe Printing had to redo the whole thing because of their mistake, and now that rep Randy is trying to convince Justin that Daner should split the cost of the reprint with them? Forget it! I can't stand it when people try to take advantage. I grew up in a print shop, for cryin' out loud. Gimme a break!

Justin does have a point, though. The murky print specs Lisa prepared on that job created a bit of a gray area in terms of culpability, but still – we give Abbe dozens of jobs a year. Over \$2 million in revenues, I'll bet! We could be hard-nosed on this. Sticking us with a bill like this just doesn't feel right. Still...maybe there's room for compromise. I know that Randy is a good guy, and besides, they've gone above and beyond the call of duty for us many times. I really don't want to torch that vendor relationship.

8:08 AM

Crossing the Detroit-Superior Bridge

[Calls Sheila.] "Hey honey, how are you feeling?... Oh, hon. Maybe you can sleep

a little after the kids go to school.... OK, put Quinn on, but make it quick.... Hey, Quinn, good luck with the test today. I know you'll do great. Finish eating, and I'll see you tonight for baseball practice.... Yes, I've got all the equipment.... No, I don't think Tommy should try to pitch; he's a great outfielder. We'll talk tonight, OK? Let me speak to Amy real quick.... Oh, all right, put me back on with Mommy.... Hi hon.... What?... No, I can't pick up the dry cleaning. I passed it ten minutes ago. And I'm already late to the office.... All right, love ya. I'll talk to you later – remember to give Amy a kiss, OK? Feel better. Bye." Note to self: Talk to Tommy's dad about why I'm keeping him in the outfield tonight – gotta figure out a nice way to let him know that his kid is talent challenged as a pitcher.

8:16 AM

Turning on West 3rd Street, near Public Square

There's the stadium. Too bad the Browns stink this year. And last year. And the year before. Damn, I really miss the old days. What a great routine we had – Mom, Dad, Gracie, and me... I... Dad always did the impossible and found a way to get tickets to the Browns-Steelers game every year. What a blast. I miss watching the games with Dad. That's when we bonded. That was our time together.

It was tough for both Dad and Mom to balance work and family, but somehow they did. They were always there for me. And boy, did they love their work. What great role models. Gracie and I were forever hanging out at the plant after school and on weekends, too. The place was always buzzing, and the teamwork was amazing. The employees felt such ownership, such a sense of responsibility for each job, big or small. Mom and Dad's formula was as relevant then as it is now. Management 101: Treat everyone with respect and consideration – employees, clients, vendors – and you get loyalty and productivity. They were so patient with me switching majors from art to sociology

in college. They were so proud when I finally got my MBA....

I can't wait to run this company. I'm going to show Larry, the team – damn, the world – where Daner can go! Note to self: Get tickets for a game this season, and take all the managers. And grab four for the family, too. I want to start making it a tradition with Sheila and the kids.

8:22 AM

Pulling into the Parking Lot, Warehouse District

This is crazy. By the time I get into the office, I've spent over an hour commuting. I've got to have Lisa – or someone – look into office space on the West Side. We'd all appreciate a reduced commute, easier parking, and more room and amenities. Remember to mention it to Larry, too.

10:52 AM

Paul's Office

[On the phone.] "You're right, George. Cuyagen needs us. We're clearly the best fit for the job. But I don't think we have quite the leverage you think we do. I feel that they're really price sensitive. What happens if we play it your way, refuse to lower our estimate, and then they walk and go with Dewald Media? I really hate Dewald. We've already lost several accounts to those guys because of their ridiculously low fees.... Yeah, I hear ya – but think of the bigger picture. We can't afford to lose ground in biotech right now. It's growing, and we need to be seen as a player, not an afterthought. Let's find a way to make the deal work and still be reasonably profitable. Maybe we reduce our pricing to get in the door, then get back to our normal fee structure down the road? Have you discussed with them our approach for quantifying the ROI on campaigns like this?... And they're still balking? Even with an ROI that could pass any sniff test? Unbelievable!... All right. I'll get back to you after I've given it some thought. Thanks for the update."

Sometimes George is so smug. I can't believe that Cuyagen wants the entire deal for 60% of what we proposed. I

wonder if they're just playing hardball to see how low we'll go or if they're really that clueless when it comes to the costs of mounting an effective campaign of this size. They won't get that with Dewald. But damn, we need this deal! I'd hate to lose the business, especially in this economy. It would be a great toehold for us in biotech.

George thinks they'll ultimately go for the higher price, even with some

I need to get tougher? What in blazes does that mean? Become an absolute jerk like George?

kicking and screaming. George and Larry have a similar approach. I'll bet if Larry saw their measly counteroffer, he'd laugh and half jokingly tell them to pound sand! Larry's always willing to walk away. Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't. But this one's too important to lose.

Note to self: Try to find out what other biotech companies have spent on comparable campaigns and provide Cuyagen with comparative studies. We need some leverage.

1:12 PM Paul's Office

Let me think....Where can I find Lisa's spreadsheets? Which folder? Here they are. Once I get through these numbers, I'll have Lynne call Lisa to confirm that the figures are still accurate. I wonder if Lynne would be a good replacement for Lisa. She's smart, she does great work, and she's quick on the uptake. I think I'll ask her to pick up some of the slack.

OK, I've got the forecasting model. I've got the expansion plans printed. I think I'm all set....I sometimes wonder if working in the shop as a kid set the stage for this...or was it B school that made a difference? A combination of both, probably.

Time to meet with Larry. Which conference room was it again?

4:12 PM Paul's Office

Oh, God, please tell me that this is just a nightmare and I'm going to wake up any minute now. How could we be so far apart when I thought we were on the same page for so long? Man, I really misread the situation. So Larry hasn't been pegging me for CEO after all. I have many of the ingredients for the job, but I've got to get tougher? "I'm thinking of you for number two." How could he? And worst of all, now he wants to consider George! What's going on here?

5:24 PM Heading Westbound on the Shoreway

OK, Paul, pull yourself together, buddy. Let's take stock here. So Larry isn't convinced I'm the man - at least not yet. Maybe I should have done a better job managing up. But I can do this job ten times better than George. There's no comparison. I think Larry's just been smitten by all the business George has been closing. Plus lately they've been drinking scotch together late into the night and telling dirty jokes. That's never been my thing.

I've been a leader in this company for ten years. George has two. I've touched virtually every facet of Daner's existence. He's been focused exclusively on new business. Larry can't deny my ability to deal with creative, operations, sales, and marketing. Customers and vendors love me, and I know the team sees me as their natural leader, friend, and champion.

So, OK, he's giving it more thought. Sometimes it feels like I don't even know Larry anymore. He used to get it. What happened? Come on....

I've clearly demonstrated my tenacity time and time again. I need to get meaner and tougher? What in blazes does that mean? Become an absolute jerk like George? Should I do that? Can I do that? Do I even want to? Do I still belong here?

What must Paul do to land the top job? • Four commentators offer expert advice.

WHY WOULD A MAN WITH INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR ONE OF THE WORLD'S BIGGEST COMPANIES ADMIT TO A MAJOR ATTRACTION FOR FRANCE?

Nani Beccalli explains
why GE can't do
without French
high-tech.



Eric Schmidt is the CEO of Google in Mountain View, California.

There is no single way to lead, and Paul's conundrum has much to do with the culture of Daner Associates. Larry doesn't come across as an all-knowing, my-way-or-the-highway type of CEO who discounts his managers' judgments, and I doubt he has run the company like an army boot camp—if he had, Paul would probably have left long ago. We might assume, then, that Larry may prefer to manage by consensus and encourages his people to do the same. In that case, Paul has some room to leverage his natural gifts while polishing his own leadership skills.

Like so many nice-guy managers, Paul is a worrier. In this case, he worries that if he doesn't accommodate others' needs, they will react in a way that will harm the company—specifically, that they might quit. This is a legitimate concern. Lisa, for example, has demonstrated that she's a top player when she's not distracted by family troubles, and it's clear that she had already let him know about her problems outside work. But Paul is an unsuccessful nice guy, afraid to confront reality, and that gets in the way of winning.

The successful nice-guy manager makes people feel very supported—to the point where they are ready to accept judgments that override their personal interests.

Let's step back in time and imagine that Paul has his first opportunity to hear Lisa's troubles out. And let's assume that Lisa has bravely tried to deal with her mother's illness by herself before confessing what's going on to her boss. She doesn't know how to fix what's happening in her life, but she doesn't really expect him to fix anything for her either. Maybe all she wants is a sympathetic ear. This is Paul's first opportunity to engage in a management technique I call "leadership therapy." This technique allows the person with the problem to feel heard and supported, but it also adjusts the picture and puts the onus for dealing with the problem right back where it belongs.

Here's how I practice leadership therapy. When a manager comes into my office and

wants to talk about a problem or feels like complaining, I pull out a sheet of paper and a pen. While he talks, I listen and take notes about what he's saying. After he's finished, I look at my notes and say, "Let me make sure I understand you," and then I summarize what I've heard in a few sentences. I've found that when people see I've given them my full attention and have proven it by repeating what they've said, they feel very supported—to the point where they are ready to accept my judgment, even if it overrides their personal interests. (By the way, it's perfectly OK to toss the piece of paper afterwards.)

I always base my response on the principles, policies, and values of the greater good, meaning the company. For example, if a valued employee comes to me complaining that he needs a raise now rather than at the standard beginning of the year, I might say something like, "I understand your position. We can't respond to your request now because that's not the way we do things around here, but I tell you what I'll do. Keep your performance at your current level or higher, and in January we'll pay particular attention to your situation." If this person tries the old ultimatum trick ("I have another offer, so give me what I demand or lose me"), I never negotiate because hostage taking goes against our core values. I say congratulations and wish him the best of luck.

Paul can practice leadership therapy with Lisa, Justin, and the others who consciously or unconsciously devolve their responsibilities onto him—the perceived nice guy. For example, Paul could listen to Lisa and then negotiate a six-month part-time contract with her. In return for backfilling for her and keeping her job open, he can demand a firm commitment from her to return full-time after that period. This is a clear and explicit response that both respects her needs and challenges her. If Lisa is the performer Paul thinks she is, she will return to work with redoubled loyalty, commitment, and performance. His success in handling Lisa's situation will demonstrate his managerial skills—not only to Larry but to everyone at Daner Associates and, most important, to himself.

In my experience, good leaders demonstrate qualities that the ancient Greeks identified as *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. *Ethos* pertains to personal values and a track record that embodies those values. *Pathos* involves the ability to listen deeply and empathize. *Logos* is the root of the word “logic” and relates to the ability to think rationally and strategically.

Paul already has plenty of *ethos*. He has fine ethical underpinnings and demonstrates kindness and concern for people. On the

welfare of the company. Instead of really listening to Larry, Paul self-justifies, rationalizes, and defensively attempts to explain away his boss’s feedback.

For the sake of argument, let’s postulate that Larry hasn’t made a final decision and is thinking hard about handing over the reins to the candidate who can best grow the company. We can safely assume that Larry appreciates the fact that Paul is a kind, ethical person who lives the values of the company and performs well. We can also assume that he’s not sure whether Paul is strong and aggressive enough to run the company and that he is being candid with Paul about his deliberations. He wants to see how Paul reacts and whether he steps up to the plate.

Instead of seeing the problem as a choice between his personal integrity and his ambition, Paul needs to get out of his own head and explore a third alternative – that of *pathos*. He can use his substantial powers of empathy to really listen to Larry, reflect on what his boss is saying, and show that he is able to learn and grow from the experience. If I were Paul, I would go to Larry and say, “When you gave me the feedback, I should have listened more closely to you.” He can ask Larry about his views and question him about his ideas and concerns. In the course of a few meetings, Paul will doubtless discover many things about which he knew very little.

Once Paul demonstrates that he has grasped his boss’s perspective on the business, Larry will surely develop a new appreciation for him. Larry may find himself surprised and pleased with Paul’s openness and willingness to be influenced – *ethos* and *pathos*. At that juncture, Paul would do well to show Larry his command of the quality of *logos*. He can share with Larry his ideas regarding the company’s strategic direction and his growth plans. He can also discuss how he plans to align the culture with the strategy by applying strong value-based leadership. Convinced that Paul has the three critical qualities of a good leader, Larry may conclude that Paul is the right man for the job after all.

I don’t believe a leopard can change its spots, but I do believe people can change theirs. People have the power to choose.

ethos downside, Paul lives too much in his own world – a world in which he feels comfortable and authentic, but one that has little to do with outward effectiveness.

Paul must make up his mind about his commitment to the company. If he really wants to be CEO, he needs to wake up. Daner Associates is not about his personal experience, values, and ambitions; it’s about customers and top- and bottom-line growth. I don’t believe a leopard can change its spots, but I do believe people can change theirs. People have the power to choose their responses to their past and present circumstances and the power to change their habits. Paul can learn to be both nice and a strong leader at the same time. To be effective, Paul has to be both: That is the definition of maturity as a leader.

Assuming Paul really does want the top job, there are some steps he can take immediately to show Larry that he’s CEO material. Paul needs to demonstrate that he can be more effective in his relationships with others, starting with Larry. The two of them are experiencing a classic breakdown in communication. Larry may not have done a great job of communicating with Paul up to this point, but, for his part, Paul doesn’t seem to care much about what Larry is thinking. Nice as he tries to be, Paul is downright disrespectful of his boss, believing him to be more interested in playing golf than in the future



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Paul needs to take a good, hard look at himself in the mirror and then decide who he wants to be when he grows up. Despite all his navel-gazing, it seems obvious that he doesn't understand himself very well. Instead of driving around locked up in his inner world and daydreaming about being Daner Associates' CEO, Paul really needs to go back to school and bone up on Leadership 101.

Paul's parents were good people, but they appear to have failed to teach Paul the harsher lessons of business. In the end, good leadership is like good parenting—it's a balancing act between kindness and toughness. Sometimes, the leader needs to be a firm disciplinarian, particularly when the future of the company is at stake.

Because he seems to believe that leadership is all about being nice, Paul is too timid to hold his people accountable for their responsibilities and goals, despite his boss's suggestions. He loses an opportunity to do this, for example, when he needs the financial data for a significant meeting. When he discovers that Lisa isn't coming into the office because of difficulties at home, her problems become his, and he has to put out her fires. Certainly, she has an obligation to her parent,

there were three ways of winning a hypothetical deal through a series of strategic transactions. The first way was to go it alone. The second was to join a team and take advantage of another team's weakness. The third was to form an alliance with another team and work together to achieve the goal. We chose the second. As our team captain, I spent a long time watching the other captains, one of whom was a very nice fellow. I quietly worked the final transaction in favor of our own team by taking advantage of his softheartedness. The result of the exercise was very interesting: The captain was embarrassed that he allowed himself to be used, and his team was angry at him as well.

The lesson I learned was that business is a competitive sport for tough players—those who play it nice quite often fall behind. In tough times, you simply can't afford to take prisoners.

Paul isn't the only one at fault here. Larry, too, needs to be tougher. It looks as if Larry has already made up his mind that George will be the next CEO, but he hasn't been straight with Paul. He doesn't want to lose Paul, but he owes him an open and honest explanation as to why he didn't get the job. Larry should sit down with Paul and walk

If I were Larry, I'd give Paul specific goals and a six-month deadline. As Lee Iacocca used to say: "In this game, you either lead, follow, or get out of the way."

but she also has one to her profession. Like any responsible adult, she needs to find a backup caretaker for her mother or, failing that, make sure that someone at the office is doing what needs to be done in her absence. Instead of confronting her with this fact, Paul lets her off the hook. This isn't fair to him, to the company, or to Lisa herself.

In losing out to a tougher player, Paul demonstrates his failure to understand that running a business requires a certain amount of hardball. I remember learning this lesson when I was earning my MBA. The professor broke the class up into teams and told us that

through what he believes are the leadership requirements for the company. Larry should make it clear that he can't micromanage Paul—that it's Paul's job to balance his management style and toughen up.

If I were in Larry's shoes, I'd suggest that Paul work closely with an executive coach. I'd give Paul specific goals and a six-month deadline. If at the end of that time, Paul hasn't demonstrated a stiffer upper lip, then Larry—or the new CEO, George—should consider a different role for him. As Lee Iacocca used to say: "In this game, you either lead, follow, or get out of the way."

Poor Paul. He's stuck in the old people-pleasing trap. It's a trap that often catches talented women because of the way we're socialized to nurture others. But I've worked with plenty of men who get stuck in it as well. If Paul were to become CEO, he would probably be the type who cuts a strategic meeting short to attend the ten-year anniversary of the janitor. Employees would love him for this, but since he tends to be so accommodating, he doesn't manage his time efficiently. In the end, he could hurt the company.

Very often, people like Paul are so attached to their internal beliefs about what makes a good leader that they put themselves through a lot of pain at work. Psychologically speaking, Paul is engaging in transference: the unconscious tendency to impose

becoming more open-minded about what motivates employees and why.

Take his relationship with Lisa. Paul wants to have a heart-to-heart with her, but what he really needs is to go head-to-head. As Peter Drucker once noted, "To keep misfits in jobs they cannot do is not being kind; it is being cruel."

Lisa is not a misfit, but her disorganization is making her one. Viewed from a broader perspective, Paul should realize that it's uncaring to allow Lisa to put her job, his reputation, and the company's well-being at risk. If he doesn't take the time to sit down and work out a strategy that will help her balance her personal needs with his professional expectations, the only thing he can count on is that she's going to continue to drop the ball.


Paul thinks and acts as if he's the most flexible guy in the world. Little does he know that his biggest problem is his own inflexible view of leadership.

the family patterns he grew up with on people at work. Paul's parents, as hardworking owners of a family business, probably inculcated in him the value of kindness, genuineness, and the common touch. While the common touch is commendable in a leader, Paul doesn't know when to quit.

People pleasers like Paul often feel they lose their authenticity when they focus on external definitions of success expressed in pay and power. They believe they're losing touch with the internal definitions to which they are so deeply attached. As a people pleaser, Paul thinks and acts as if he's the most flexible guy in the world; as such, he assumes he'd do an even better job as CEO than Larry. Little does he know that his biggest problem is his own inflexible definition of what a leader should be. By imposing his penchant for pleasing on his boss, his colleagues, and others in his company, he runs the risk of self-sabotage.

If he wants to become CEO, Paul must operate with his head as well as his heart. In terms of organizational dynamics, this means

Moreover, Lisa may not respect the fact that Paul hasn't set clear standards, although she'd probably never tell him so. She won't admit that she needs a manager who holds her more accountable, because it's so convenient for her to work for such a nice guy. However, when she loses her job and can't find another one, she may be a lot less grateful.

It's not too late. Paul is clearly talented, and his relationship with Larry seems solid. But if he wants this promotion, he will need to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that he can move out of his people-pleasing comfort zone and operate more decisively. If he can't do this, it is likely that George will get the job. Who knows how the corporate culture will evolve then? The personal incentive for Paul is that if he can learn to define more flexibly what it is to be a great leader, he has a solid shot at preserving both the economic security and the interpersonal well-being of the employees who count on him. 



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